



Dr. Homi Bhabha State University, Mumbai
Elphinstone College



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PSEUDOPSYCHOLOGY



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Dr. Homi Bhabha State University

विश्वविद्यालयः बौद्धिकसंस्कृतेः प्रेरणास्रोतः अस्ति
(University always pioneers intellectual and scholarly pursuits)

Vision

To be a premier institution of higher learning, committed to academic excellence, research, innovation, and social transformation, that prepares future leaders for a sustainable and equitable world

Our mission is to provide high-quality education, foster critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity and encourage innovative research that leads to social transformation.

We aim to empower our students with the necessary skills, knowledge, and values to contribute to the betterment of humankind. We strive to create an inclusive, diverse and welcoming environment that promotes personal growth, teamwork, ethics and leadership development.

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FOREWORD

Pseudopsychology is a classic case of the tail wagging the dog. So pervasive and deeply entrenched are certain notions in public discourse that these pseudopsychological explanations often pass as scientifically grounded psychological approaches. The limited availability of trained psychologists has created a vacuum that is increasingly filled by pop-psy books, workshops, training sessions, articles, blogs, and videos that frequently operate outside the boundaries of scientific inquiry.

As psychology deals with behaviour and thought, it is easy to supplant your notions as valid perspectives on the naive. What ultimately endures transcends the contestation of theoretical constructs, objective scrutiny, and methodological rigour. Take punishment for example. It has become an established norm wherein punishment for children is considered taboo. This is spread with evangelical fervour by people who know not the constructs of behaviourism or behaviour modification. They confuse punishment with abuse, which is far displaced from the theoretical notion. Another popular gospel is that parents should not even raise their voice on children. So we have kids jumping out of balconies the moment life appears tough to them. What cognitive or developmental foundations, if any, underpinned the propagation of such creative notions?

Our society once had a tradition of folk artists, saints, kirtankars, and ashrams where people would seek solace in troubled times. The remedy was extracted from spiritual teachings in sacred texts that exhorted virtuous living. The traditional systems got squeezed out, but the demand did not wane. Hence the mushrooming of new-age ashrams, babas, maharajs, television channels, influencers, and a gamut of self-proclaimed healers. Concurrently, the corporate world, driven by elitist pursuits, gravitated toward motivational speakers and management gurus.

India still does not have enough trained mental health professionals to cater to the huge demand, which has increased exponentially post-pandemic. Psychology as a separate discipline is relatively recent in India, severing from philosophy around the 1970s. The message for young professionals is clear: if competent and credible services are not delivered, individuals will turn elsewhere for help, often toward 'remedies' that may be unscientific, unregulated, or unsupported by evidence.

Denouncing pseudopsychology is easy. The challenge is to cultivate mental health professionals of quality, marked by depth of capacity, competence, and sincerity. Our department has embraced that challenge.

CONCEPT NOTE

Psychology today goes beyond our classrooms, clinics, and research journals. It exists on our phones in various social media platforms, books, and movies. It is all around us. The exponential increase in internet access, especially during the pandemic, forced Psychology to move to an online medium rather than staying within the physical limits that it had primarily existed in. A person might not have a house or developed infrastructure in their locality, but will still own a phone with internet access. This has made people curious about the human mind, behaviour, and why people are the way they are. This has given us a pathway to have serious conversations about mental health, but with that, we see a rise in Pseudopsychology.

Pseudopsychology borrows ideas, language, and practices of science to make it sound reliable and valid when, in reality, it is not based on robust evidence. Pseudopsychology has found its way into our everyday parlance, using terms like manifesting or using therapeutic jargon colloquially. Which is why we decided to tackle this subject in our magazine.

In this issue, we explore why people are drawn to such practices, how they have become normalized, and the impact they have on the public's understanding of psychology. It includes different cognitive and social mechanisms that make pseudopsychological ideas more persuasive, such as the Barnum effect, Law of Attractions, and confirmation bias. We look at how mental health and psychology are portrayed in Bollywood cinema. Contrasting between dramatized and realistic portrayals of mental health struggles.

This issue also features an interview with Dr. Sheetal Bidkar, who reflects on how pseudopsychology affects mental health and how its effects are seen in clinical practices. She talks about how we as professionals need to reach out to more people and talk about sensitive topics, to counter the narrative created by pseudopsychology professionals.

Our goal is not to completely dismiss these beliefs, but rather to encourage our readers to critically engage with the information that they consume, asking questions before subscribing to a belief.

*The views expressed in the interview and articles are personal to the authors. The editorial team and the Department of Psychology may or may not endorse them.

Meet Our Team

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RAKSHITA PALANDE

So Far...

WORKSHOPS

Research Designs in Behavioural Science

A six-day Research Methodology Workshop under the PM-USHA Grant to Strengthen Universities (GSU) initiative was organised for Master's students. The sessions were delivered by Shri Shivanand Thorat (IIT Delhi), Shri Sandeep Bhaise (SNDT, Pune), and Ms. Charvi Joshi.

It focused on key areas such as research problems and hypotheses, sampling techniques, and major research designs. Concepts were explained through structured teaching along with activities, such as case studies, experiment formulation and in-depth group discussions.

Movement-based Hula-hoop

Conducted by Trisha Maurya from MA-II, it focused on body awareness and creative expression through flow-based hoop movement. It introduced warm-ups, foundational hoop techniques, and guided movement sequences that helped in stress relief and playful self-expression.



Relaxation Techniques

Conducted by Sriza Dasgupta from MA-II, it introduced evidence-based relaxation strategies such as box breathing, guided imagery, and Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) to manage stress and support overall psychological well-being.

Career Guidance and Assessment

With great expertise in this field, Ms. Tejal Nandrajog conducted the workshop that focused on understanding interests, aptitudes, personality traits, and values through assessment techniques and interpretation. Through discussions and practical examples, participants learned how career guidance can support personal growth, decision-making, and professional development.

Working with Children and Adolescents

Facilitated by Ms. Heta Dwivedi, it emphasized on understanding the developmental, emotional, and social needs of children and adolescents. Students gained insights into creating supportive and empathetic spaces for children and adolescents.



So Far...

WORKSHOPS

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

With great expertise in the field, Ms. Asira Chirmuley introduced the six core processes of ACT. It helped participants understand how ACT principles can support emotional well-being and meaningful action in daily life through mindfulness exercises and reflective discussions.

16 PF

Conducted by Ms. Harshi Mamania, a Junior Counselor at HBSU, it introduced to the students administration, scoring, and practical applications of 16 PF.



Mumbai, Maharashtra, India
Mahatma Gandhi Vidyalyaya Marg, Fort,
Mumbai, Maharashtra 400032, India
Lat 18.927271, Long 72.831427
09/27/2025 01:44 PM GMT+05:30
Note - Captured by GPS Map Camera

Sports Psychology

Conducted by Ms. Jinal Mehta, it emphasized the importance of psychological skills training, teamwork and the role of a sports psychologist in high-performance training, injury rehabilitation, youth development, and team dynamics.

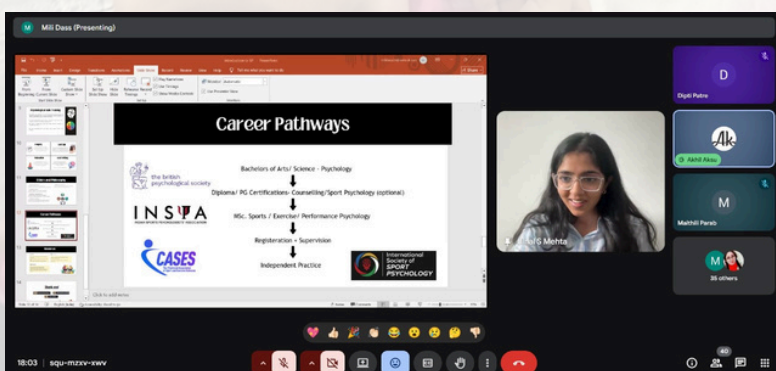


Opportunities in Social Sector

This session introduced Psychology students to careers in the social sector, providing insights into the wide range of opportunities within NGOs, foundations, CSR initiatives, and social enterprises. It was conducted by Mr. Biswajit Kar.

Health and Well-Being: An Indian Approach

Facilitated by Dr. Umesh Bharte, the session explored the relevance of Indian Psychology, emphasizing holistic wellness, mindfulness, and the interconnectedness of mind, body, and spirit. It encouraged students to critically reflect on Western psychological frameworks and appreciate the value of indigenous knowledge systems in understanding mental health.





CLUB ACTIVITIES

Suicide Prevention Day

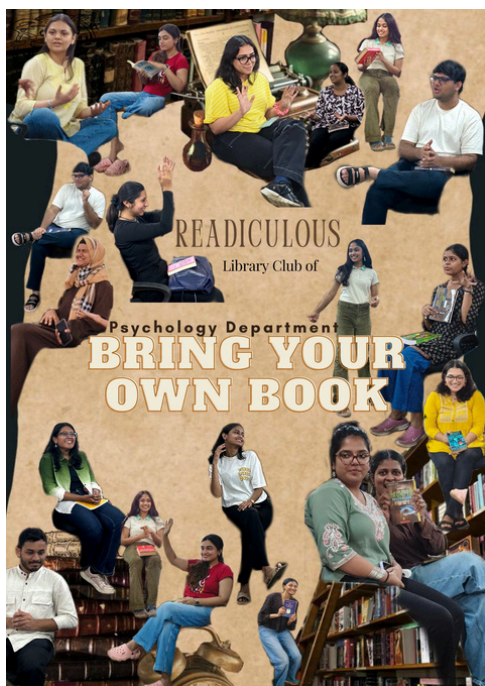
On the occasion of Suicide Prevention Day, students set up booth activities at Elphinstone College, Sydenham College, and the Institute of Science. It included picking uplifting affirmations and engaging students in small reflective tasks that encouraged kindness towards themselves and others. The students created simple stickman figures symbolising solidarity and pledged to stand for mental health and support suicide prevention, signing their names as a promise of hope. Another important highlight of the event was the street play titled "Zindagi Ka Safar (Suffer)", performed by our students. It depicted how academic pressure, workplace challenges, family conflicts, and financial difficulties can contribute to suicidal ideation, while also stressing the importance of timely intervention and prevention.

Teaching Assistantship

The TA Club conducted an orientation session for FY students on practical work, which covered basic guidelines, ethical considerations, demonstrations, and instructions for experiments such as the Human Maze and Müller-Lyer Illusion. A report writing session was conducted for FY students to help them understand the format of report writing. Additionally, an interactive session was conducted on Schools of Thought in Psychology for FY and SY students. It helped them gain a basic understanding of different schools of Psychology.

Awareness Campaign in Institute of Science

The objective of the campaign was to reach out to different students and departments of the university and spread awareness about mental health. Through interactive discussions and skits, the students gained clarity about what the Counselling is, whom it is for and how to enroll for counselling.



Bring Your Own Book

The Readiculious (Library) club organised an innovative auction and book exchange event titled 'Bring your own book', wherein the 'sellers' pitched their books, followed by an auction where the other participants bid against each other. The currency was the words of the participants which they used in creative, appealing, convincing, poetic and humorous ways. This activity fostered a healthy discussion regarding various authors, books, genres, translations and adaptations, appreciation of illustrations and critical and divergent thinking through its interactive structure.



Freshers Party for FYBA

New batches, new beginnings !! Here's Fresher's Party of MA-I and FYBA, organised by MA-II and 'Fundamentals' Club respectively. The New batches were warmly welcomed with fun activities, games, music and performances. The energy and excitement were truly commendable!



FACT OR FAUX?

Interview conducted by Sachin Y., Akhil B. & Abha K.

(Fact)

Interview with
Dr. Sheetal Bidkar



Dr. Sheetal Bidkar is a Counselling Psychologist with 18 years of experience in psychotherapy, addiction rehabilitation, psycho-oncology, and mental health counselling. She holds an MPhil (YCMOU, Nashik) and PhD (PAH Solapur University) in psychology, and has pursued her BA from Garware College, Pune and MA (Psy) from Shivaji University, Kolhapur. She also holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Child & Family Counselling and is an internationally certified Addiction Therapist (ICAP-I) recognized by the International consortium of Universities for Drug Demand Reduction (ICUDDR).

Dr. Bidkar is currently serving as a Psychologist at Glenegles Multi-Speciality Hospital and is also the Founder of ManoVidya Mind Wellness Center. Her areas of expertise include psychotherapy for individuals and couples, psychological assessment, addiction treatment, and counselling for cancer patients and cognitive stimulation for seniors. She was also recognized by the Military Hospital, Secunderabad in 2014 for her contribution to mental health services.

Along with her clinical practice, she actively conducts mental health workshops and has appeared on All India Radio to spread awareness about mental health and emotional well-being. Her work reflects a balance of strong academic grounding, clinical expertise, and a compassionate approach toward mental wellness.

Can you tell us a little about how you got into this field? What inspired you to become a psychologist?

Going back to 1999, it was accidental that I chose a psychology course, because I aspired to go with Political Science and MPSC or something. When I was doing my 12th, there was a special batch in my college for some kids, where they started encouraging us about study skills, etc. This batch had psychology as a subject. The professor who taught it was also my relative, so I got the opportunity to discuss a lot of topics with her. She used to talk about memory and related concepts, which inspired me further. Later, I also started reading books recommended by the professor. By 12th, I had made the decision that I wanted to become a practising psychologist. So, in BA, I chose Psychology and aspired to become a psychologist. At that point, I didn't know about any specialisation. Then, I shifted from my hometown to Shivaji University, and the roads started opening when I began searching. Also, my teachers were amazing. I got amazing gurus from graduation to PhD.

(Faux)

A specimen from local train walls

महाराष्ट्राली वंशीकरण मुठ्ठकरनी ?
Consult Your Problem ?
बाबा सीगमंडर फ्रॉड
0123456789
खुला चैलेन्स 6 घंटे में 100% लाभ गारन्टी
आपकी मनोकामना 100% पूर्ण होगी
A TO Z समस्याओं का 100% तुरन्त समाधान
मेरे कियेको कोई काट दे उसे मुँह मोंगा ईनाम
9876543210 Quack Quack

Do you think culture shapes the kind of psychological ideas that thrive in a society? How does cultural context allow for certain pseudopsychological practices?

I think, obviously, culture plays a big role. Pseudopsychology has its base in cultural practices. Though there is not a lot of peer-reviewed research, and it's not a very scientific method either, it validates cultural and individual needs. The method is very passively adaptive; the practitioner does not need to do many things; it is more about validating clients.

For example, Zodiac signs and their interpretations are validations. It's not that the person is actively involved; rather, something is being shared through that interpretation. A lot of the time, the burden of doing something about the problem is reduced, and only the problem is validated.

Many times, they only label the problems; that's why we say it is misleading. Which makes it harmful. We have to understand what made pseudopsychology popular, and secondly, we have to understand the language and expressions they use. That also plays a big role in its popularity. Another reason is that there is no stigma attached to it, and there is wide accessibility, while qualified and good mental health practitioners are in short supply. People can openly say, "My guru says this..." or "My healer says this..." and this is not seen as a sign of weakness.



Pseudo-psychological ideas from zodiac types to pop personality tests continue to capture people's attention. Why do you think they feel so emotionally true to people, even without scientific evidence?

Emotional validation is a main factor. The Barnum effect plays a role here. These practices rely on generalisations, and those generalisations get validated. All pseudopsychology practitioners are masters at using this kind of language.

I also feel that there is a need for belongingness and identity. For example, if I am like this, and others like me behave in a certain way, then it does not feel like I am the odd man out, and that itself is validating. Pseudopsychologists label or validate their clients' emotions using generalised statements. There is no responsibility placed on the individual, and through labelling, validation, and the Barnum effect, it becomes more appealing. That is how pseudopsychology gains a hold over people.

How does social media amplify pseudopsychology?

These days, it is very easy to spread information, especially through social media. Earlier, it was different. Previously, if you really wanted to publish something in a magazine or newspaper, there was a middle party involved that would decide whether people would like it or not, and whether some filtering element should be there. Social media has no such filter; you can talk freely, and vulnerable people can be affected. Advertisements also play a role through the language they use. These days, it is very easy to spread

In psychology, we understand that if we, practitioners, do certain things, consequences will follow; it is not just about labelling. Earlier, depression was considered a very serious term, but nowadays it is not perceived the same way. Social media has desensitised the heaviness of various concepts or terms.

Social media does provide reach, but it often lacks awareness. In Mumbai, you can see many people advertising fake psychology practices.

“

One limitation of psychology is that we are not reaching out to people as much as pseudopsychology professionals are.

”

Can you shed light on some current trends/practices that you think should be scrutinised?

Influencer culture needs to be scrutinised. Many influencers speak about mental health simply because they get paid, and these influencers, rather than leading people, often end up misleading them. Knowing that there are not enough psychologists for the population, I think things like AI chatboxes may be useful for subclinical practices, like basic education and awareness. However, when it comes to real clinical issues, influencer culture becomes problematic.

It is like reading a basic medical book and then giving surgical suggestions or guidance.

Certain apps can help in areas like breathing exercises, and in some ways, are useful if used within limits. Popularity cannot be the criterion for using anything. The internet is filled with personality typologies and self-tests, which can promote self-labelling. Even if it is a checklist or self-assessment, it has to be done through a standardised process. Because of this, there is also a tendency to exaggerate. People casually talk about attachment styles, trauma, narcissism, and similar concepts, and overusing these terms can lead to serious issues.

Many people end up using pseudopsychological practices under the pretext of self-exploration or comfort. How can one distinguish between the two?

It's an insightful question. The purpose of self-exploration in a therapeutic session is to learn about behavioural and thinking patterns and then try to introduce an intervention and provide continuous care so that it empowers the individual, and not just be dependent on the therapist.

While intervention is important, we also say that termination is equally important. Our goal as psychologists is to help clients address current issues, equip them for the future, prevent relapse, and empower them to manage difficulties independently. There is no termination procedure in pseudopsychology; they want people to come back.

In psychology, there is evidence that every case and every protocol we use differ depending on factors such as intensity, culture, age, and symptom frequency; there is also an assessment for this. In pseudopsychology, however, they use untested procedures, vague generalisations occur, and anecdotal evidence is relied upon, which keeps people dependent on practitioners.

The message in pseudopsychology often appears to answer questions related to self-exploration, but it can also encourage self-deception.

Do you think pseudopsychology reveals something deeper about society's collective anxieties, like the need for control, identity, or validation in uncertain times?

Society is developed by a group of people with communal social values. Just as individual emotional validation is important, communal emotional validation is also significant because it gives people a sense of belongingness. These concepts (of pseudopsychology) develop through people who share similar kinds of practices, which helps bring people closer together. I feel that in life, people are searching for an identity, and these pseudopsychological labels provide that identity. That collective anxiousness, I think, is what often drives these pseudopsychological practices.

I think the locus of control also works differently in pseudopsychological practices. For example, if you belong to a particular zodiac sign, you are "bound" to behave in a certain way. That becomes a collective identity. It feels more comfortable, and the locus of control shifts from internal to external, making it easier to function that way. People will even proudly comment things like, "I tend to be angry because my zodiac sign is XYZ."

There are also many typological groups like "this type of person will do this," or "that type of person will behave in that way". In this process, people are grouped so that the problem no longer belongs to the individual but to the identity type itself. The nature of the problem shifts, and because of that, coping with it also changes. It becomes easier because it is no longer "me," but "we." That is what makes the situation feel easier, more passive, and more enjoyable.

Sometimes, pop-psychology terms like toxic, gaslighting, or trauma bonding are overused. How do such buzzwords affect genuine psychological understanding?

Clinical precision is lost. The word "gaslighting," for example, is now very commonly used, without clinical precision that makes it misleading. The same has happened with terms like trauma. People who are genuinely dealing with such issues may begin to perceive them merely as labels, and the sensitivity attached to these concepts is lost. This is also due to the huge accessibility of information.

Words like "trauma bonding" and "toxic" are used so frequently that they oversimplify serious concepts. The basic term "toxic" is no longer meaningful because everything is labelled as toxic, and then people feel the need to add even more serious words to express something. This eventually devalues the issue itself, and it becomes more about trends.

For example, the term adult ADHD started trending suddenly after COVID, and now, in 2025, the trend has shifted more toward terms like trauma bonding. It appears that certain terminologies become popular for a period of time. This makes it difficult for people to seek help, because issues become labels rather than diagnosable conditions that require appropriate treatment. Through this oversimplification and over-sensitisation, we are not able to reach people effectively. So what is the use of popularity if we are unable to provide proper guidance? It also devalues professionals, as there is often no qualification required for people who practice pseudopsychology. Under the name of "well-being," people can promote almost anything, like abundance healing or similar practices, because "well-being" itself does not have a restricted definition.

Therefore, I recommend people to ask about the qualification, training and therapy modality used. That itself will educate people about what should be checked before any intervention. And I also feel that for people who are suffering, any kind of relief is acceptable for the time being. They feel relief is more important than whether the intervention is coming from a qualified person, evidence-based or not. Unfortunately, those vulnerable populations get drawn into pseudopsychology due to the Barnum effect.

How can early-career practitioners navigate the grey zone between science and judgement responsibly?

We have to understand that we represent the science of psychology. If something is not supported by psychological science, then, as a matter of curiosity, you may still explore it personally, but you cannot practice it under the umbrella of psychology. You may say, "I am trained in psychology, but my interest lies in this area," but at that point, you are not practising as a psychologist. For psychological concerns, you have to follow science and evidence-based practice.



Where psychology asks critical questions, pseudopsychology offers an illusion of answers.

How do you see the future of psychotherapy, leaning more toward integrative science or toward the art of intuition?

So, I think the future of psychology looks very hopeful. We now have AI, trained psychologists, and specialised psychologists who focus on particular populations. We are also seeing the growth of new specialisations, such as practitioners who work only in child psychology or forensic psychology. Online therapy has also become very popular. This has the potential to help a large population and improve both the scope and accessibility of psychology. Now, even the government is taking good steps, and people are developing a clearer understanding of whom to approach for what kind of help. Now, in a metropolitan city, inquiries are becoming very specific, with people clearly saying that they want a psychologist and not a psychiatrist. I think that the stigma that has been around for a long time is gradually changing; now it's starting to become clearer to people. Also, we have more psychologists now, and can visibly see an increase in male psychologists or therapists, which is helpful for clients who prefer male therapists. As much as we're talking about female mental health, conversations around men's mental health are also increasing. I am very hopeful that, with all these developments, psychology will become a much better and more accessible space in the future.

UNDER THE SILVER SPELL: THE MOON IN MYTH, MADNESS AND MEANING

by Disha Dabholkar, MA-I

For as long as humans have gazed at the night sky, the moon has been more than just a silent companion orbiting Earth. It has been a timekeeper, a goddess, a muse, and very often an object of superstition. Its phases inspired calendars, rituals, and fears. For some, it promised prosperity and fertility; for others, it foretold madness and misfortune.

In this article, I want to take you on a journey through moon-related beliefs starting in India and moving across Asia, Africa, and Europe before exploring the concept of lunacy, a diagnosis once tied to the moon. Along the way, we ask: how much is rooted in science, and how much in myth?

The moon's phases, new moon, waxing, full moon, and waning have long been seen as predicting human destiny and natural rhythms. A full moon is often linked to heightened energy and restlessness. Folklore across cultures associates it with werewolves, spiritual rituals, and erratic behavior. Whereas, a new moon in some traditions is known as a time for fresh beginnings, in others, a moment of caution and darkness. Eclipses, for that matter, are rare and unsettling; they were seen as cosmic warnings. From dragons devouring the moon in China to restrictions placed on pregnant women in India, eclipses carried weighty symbolism. Farmers worldwide used moon phases to plan planting and harvesting, believing crops grew better under certain lunar conditions.

These beliefs reflect humanity's search for order in the rhythms of nature.

The article traces moon-related beliefs across cultures from India to Asia, Africa, and beyond while questioning how much is rooted in science versus myth. The moon's phases have long been linked to human behavior and natural rhythms, with full moons associated with heightened energy and new moons symbolizing either renewal or caution, and eclipses often viewed as ominous signs. In India, the moon (Chandra) shapes religious life through the lunar calendar, where Purnima is auspicious, and Amavasya tied to ancestral rituals, while eclipses carry notions of impurity. In China and Japan, the moon appears in legends and cultural practices like the Mid-Autumn Festival and Tsukimi, while in the Islamic world, it determines key observances such as Ramadan and Eid. Across African traditions, it symbolizes fertility, rebirth, and ancestral presence, with eclipses seen as disruptions in cosmic balance. Together, these beliefs reflect humanity's enduring effort to find meaning and order in the cycles of nature.

The Lunar New Year, celebrated in East Asia, marks renewal, prosperity, and togetherness. In Native American Traditions, each full moon carries a seasonal name: Harvest Moon, Wolf Moon, Snow Moon. Neo-Paganism & Wicca, modern rituals embrace the moon's symbolism for healing, empowerment, and manifestation. From Shakespeare to modern films, the moon remains a symbol of mystery, romance, and longing. These practices show that the moon endures not just as a scientific object but as a cultural canvas.

Perhaps the most striking cultural belief is the association between the moon and mental illness. The word lunacy derives from lunaticus (Latin), meaning “moonstruck.” Greeks and Romans believed the brain, being moist, was especially sensitive to the moon’s gravitational pull, much like tides. English law classified “lunatics” as those whose insanity fluctuated with the lunar cycle, in contrast to the “natural fool,” whose condition was permanent. Up until the 18th century, physicians frequently attributed conditions such as seizures, sleepwalking, and sudden violent outbursts to the influence of the moon, reflecting the deep-rooted belief that lunar phases could disturb the human mind. This association became embedded in legal and medical language, most notably in the Lunacy Act 1845, which formally institutionalized the term “lunacy.” Although the Act aimed to reform care by bringing oversight and structure to the treatment of mental illness, these lingering lunar beliefs subtly shaped practices within asylums. Patients were often subjected to heightened restraint, isolation, or surveillance during full moons, as symptoms were expected to worsen, despite the lack of scientific evidence. In institutions such as Bethlem Royal Hospital, such assumptions reinforced a system that prioritized control over individualized care. This history illustrates how the moon once functioned as a placeholder for limited scientific understanding, influencing both the interpretation of mental illness and the mistreatment of those who experienced it.

*Power lies not in physical
influence, but in cultural
meaning.*

In contemporary psychology and popular culture, the moon remains a metaphor for the mind’s hidden depths. In astrology, a person’s “moon sign” is said to govern emotions and inner life. In Popular Psychology, the moon is shorthand for mood swings or irrational behavior. Modern Rituals suggest that full moon gatherings, journaling, and “moon baths” reflect the enduring emotional symbolism of lunar phases. The moon may not govern our biology, but it continues to influence how we understand and express our emotions.



Do lunar phases really affect human behavior? Research suggests not.

Large-scale scientific studies have consistently found no reliable evidence linking lunar phases to increases in crime, suicides, or psychiatric hospital admissions. Early assumptions about “lunar madness” have been challenged by systematic reviews and meta-analyses, which show that rates of psychiatric disturbances remain stable across moon cycles. Similarly, research has not supported claims that seizures, violent behavior, or emergency visits increase during full moons. While a few studies have suggested slight variations in sleep patterns such as reduced sleep quality or shorter duration during full moons these findings remain inconsistent and are not considered robust. Despite the apparent similarity between the menstrual cycle and the lunar cycle in length, scientific evidence does not support a universal biological connection between the two. In agriculture, controlled experiments have also failed to demonstrate any significant effect of lunar phases on crop growth, challenging long-held farming traditions.

The persistence of such beliefs is often explained by confirmation bias, a psychological tendency in which individuals remember unusual or dramatic events occurring during full moons while overlooking the far more common uneventful nights. Thus, although modern science largely dismisses lunar superstitions, the moon continues to hold powerful symbolic and cultural significance across societies.

Across continents and centuries, the moon has been a goddess, a farmer’s guide, a witch’s ally, and a supposed cause of madness. It has shaped calendars, inspired festivals, and sparked fear. Yet science tells us otherwise. Beyond controlling tides and providing light, the moon does not dictate human behavior, fertility, or psychology. Its power lies not in physical influence, but in cultural meaning. And so the question remains: when we whisper about lunacy, celebrate under a full moon, or fear an eclipse, are we honoring ancient wisdom or simply keeping alive one of humanity’s oldest myths?



QUIZ PARODY

WHAT PSEUDOSCIENCE ARE YOU?

ANSWER HONESTLY. NO JUDGMENT.

When something goes wrong, you:

- A) Blame Mercury retrograde**
- B) Think everything will be fine**
- C) Buy a crystal**

Your career advice comes from:

- A) A birth chart reading**
- B) From my mind and thoughts, success will appear**
- C) A fingerprint scan**

PAST LIVES AND PRESENT MIND: EXPLORING THE JOURNEY BEYOND TIME

by Rodiya John, FY

*"Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate."
- Carl Jung*

Imagine your brain as an iceberg. You only see the small tip sticking out of the water; that's your conscious mind. But below the surface, there's a vast, mysterious subconscious swirling away, stirring up memories, feelings... maybe even secrets from lives you've lived and left behind. Now, here's the wild part: if you don't shine a light on that hidden part, it quietly calls the shots while you just call it "fate."

So, what if the stories that shape our lives aren't just from the current lifetime? What if it's from our past, not the past we know and live in, but the past that's unknown to our consciousness, that happened centuries before? It's called past life regression, a hypnotic journey where people say they recall memories from previous lives. Sci-fi stuff? Maybe, but it's always been around for centuries in spiritual traditions like Hinduism and Buddhism. Then it got fast-forwarded to the 20th century, and hypnosis got in on the act thanks to pioneers like Mesmer and Freud trying to unlock the mind's hidden corners.

Back in the 1950s, the world went wild over the curious case of Bridey Murphy. A Colorado housewife named Virginia Tighe, under hypnosis by amateur hypnotist Morey Bernstein, began recalling vivid memories of a past life as an Irish woman named Bridey Murphy, a charming 19th-century life in Cork, and even the tragic details of her death after a fall. Virginia spoke with surprising detail about Bridey's family, home, and even wedding traditions she'd never known in this life. It was like something straight out of a mystery novel, sparking a cultural whirlwind about reincarnation and past lives. While cynics later said it was cryptomnesia, a mix of forgotten memories and imagination. Even though things are confusing and unsure, the Bridey Murphy story still remains as a fascinating peek into the subconscious and the power of hypnosis to unlock hidden stories, real or imagined.

From a psychological view, some therapists see past-life regression as a way to connect with a person's buried emotions and old wounds.



That weird fear you have? Could it be from a trauma not from this lifetime, but an earlier one? Healing through the subconscious sounds pretty cool, doesn't it? But skeptics warn us that under hypnosis, the brain is a master storyteller, mixing imagination with suggestion. So those memories might just be Hollywood scripts our minds create.

Now, if we get philosophical, things get really interesting. Believers in reincarnation think past life regression helps us decode the soul's journey like unlocking cheat codes to karma, revisiting unfinished business across lifetimes. And it begs this question: are we just flesh and bone with a one-time ticket? Or timeless spirits trying on different lives to grow, learn, and maybe get it right?

Of course, not everyone's buying it. Mainstream psychiatry often considers past life regression as pseudoscience, a cocktail of false memories and ethical puzzles. But if you ask someone who's tried it, they will tell you about breakthroughs, epiphanies, and a bit of magic.

So, here's the interesting question, suppose if hypnosis can take us beyond this life, what does it tell us about who we really are? What does it make of our very own existence? Does that mean we're not trapped in a single timeline? Is life more like an endless series with plot twists we haven't even imagined?

Personally, if these past life memories are fact or fantasy, I think past life regression is a fascinating mirror to our subconscious, an invitation to explore our inner world, heal old pain that's been there for centuries, and get a bigger idea about ourselves. It's a fusion of storytelling, psychological depth, and a whisper of the mysterious.

Would you take a hypnotic trip to your deepest self? Because sometimes, the wildest journeys don't happen out there, they happen deep inside us.



CONNECTING DOTS

Psychology is a science, but many popular trends masquerade as "psychological facts." Look at the claims below and determine which ones are scientific and which are Pseudopsychology. Match the claim to its psychological reality.

The claim

- 1. "I can manifest my dream life just by thinking about it every morning."
- 2. "Your personality is written in the loops of your 'g's and the crosses of your 't's."
- 3. "I'm acting this way because the Moon is in my zodiac sign's house."
- 4. "You can tell a child's future career and IQ just by scanning their fingerprints."
- 5. "I was forced to do it because I was under a deep trance where I lost all control."
- 6. "Everyone I don't like is a 'narcissist' or 'toxic' based on this TikTok I saw."
- 7. "This card says I will meet a 'tall, dark stranger,' and it's 100% accurate."

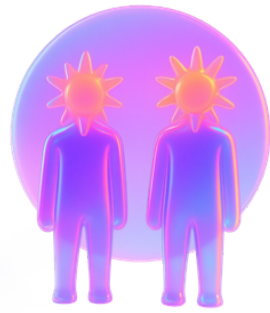
The Reality Check

- A. Social Media Therapy Speak: Misapplying clinical terms (like 'gaslighting' or 'trauma dumping') to everyday minor conflicts.
- B. Barnum Effect: People believe generic personality descriptions (like Tarot or Horoscopes) apply specifically to them.
- C. Law of Attraction: The belief that one's thoughts can directly influence the external material world without physical action.
- D. Analytical Gap: Research shows no consistent link between handwriting features and personality traits.
- E. Confirmation Bias: Noticing events that align with lunar cycles while ignoring the majority that do not.
- F. Pseudoscience: Dermatoglyphics Multiple Intelligence Test has no empirical evidence supporting its "diagnostic" accuracy for IQ
- G. State of Suggestibility: It is a voluntary state of focus; a person cannot be made to do something against their moral will.

*Your Brain is a Meaning Making Machine,
sometimes it makes up meanings that aren't there.*

THE COSMOS DIDN'T CALL. IT MASS-TEXTED

by Dikshaa Sahu, MA-I



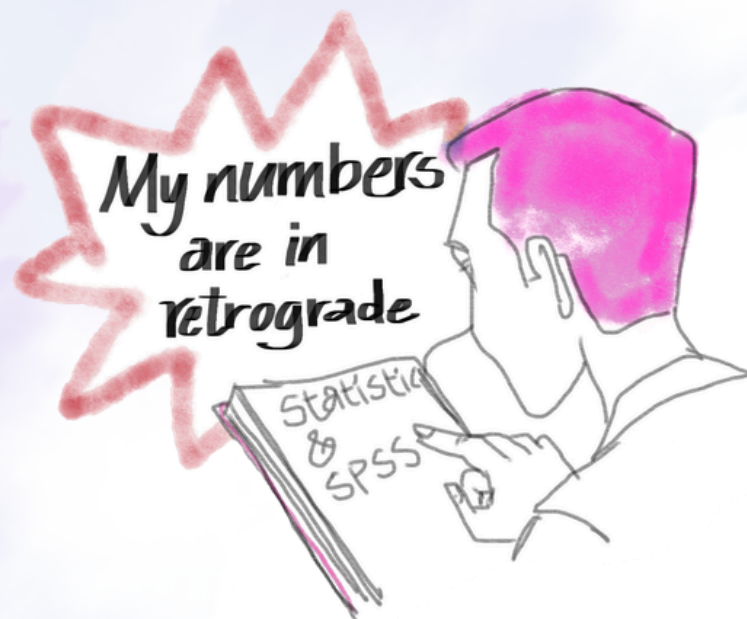
“Wow, that’s so me!” If you’ve ever said that after reading an Instagram post on zodiac signs and what it tells about you, you’ve already been caught in the web of the Barnum Effect. Named after the showman P. T. Barnum, who famously claimed to have “a little something for everyone,” this psychological trick explains why vague, generalised statements feel so uncannily accurate to everyone.

In 1963, Karl Popper, a famous philosopher, wrote: ‘It is a typical soothsayer’s trick to predict things so vaguely that the predictions can hardly fail: that they become irrefutable.’ This is exactly why the moment someone tells you, “You sometimes struggle with self-doubt but deep down you know you’re strong,” your brain nods in approval. After all, who doesn’t? The magic lies in the fact that these descriptions are so broad that they apply to almost anyone.

Psychologist Bertram Forer proved this way back in 1948 with a genius experiment. He administered a personality test to the students and later handed them what appeared to be “personalised feedback.” Everyone was blown away by how accurate the analysis was. Plot twist: each student had received the exact same description. Word. For. Word. And yet, most rated it highly accurate. You see how it works? That little experiment exposed the Barnum Effect, and honestly, we’ve been falling for it ever since.

Humans are extremely ardent in finding their purpose in this life. We are wired to seek meaning and identity in the struggle of life, so whenever a line “fits,” it feels like the universe has sent a secret message that is only meant for you. That’s why horoscopes, tarot cards, or even BuzzFeed quizzes appear to know our deepest selves. The hard reality is that they don’t. They’re just masters of making the general sound extremely personal by tapping into the most common qualities that almost all humans share.

Now, let’s walk into the glittery world of pseudosciences, where Barnum’s effect is still cashing in. This is exactly where practices like astrology, palm reading, numerology, and graphology sneak in. Each of these practices thrives on general statements, pattern-seeking behaviour, and our hunger for validation.



Take astrology, for example, zodiac signs are the perfect playground for Barnum's trick. You read, "Leos are natural leaders but sometimes struggle with pride," and suddenly you're nodding, as if the positioning of the planets now all makes sense. But hey, wait, who hasn't struggled with pride? Astrology works because it turns everyday general traits into cosmic realities that seem unique, even though they're universal. It's fun and comforting, but scientifically, there's no proof that the stars decided your personality before you had even started to grow up, and have several different experiences that actually shape your personality.

Palmistry is another classic. The lines on your hands supposedly tell you about what your life would look like, how many children you are going to have, which profession you would go into, and so much more. Apparently, the "heart line" reveals your love life, the "head line" your intellect, and the "life line" your vitality. It sounds profound, definitely. At the end of the day, those are just folds of skin that every hand has. Still, when a palmist declares, "You're underconfident when it comes to confrontations," it feels believable. The statement is just broad enough to make anyone feel seen. Once again, Barnum is at work.

And Numerology? Add your birthday, multiply your age, divide by your mood, and voila, here you have your "life path number" that reveals who you are. We humans always spot patterns in everything as if it's a signal from our spirit angel, e.g., seeing 11:11 on the clock makes us feel some cosmic energy even though it's just... time. When numerology tells us, "Your number shows creativity and inner struggle," we lean in, not because the math is mathing, but because the words strike both our ego and our curiosity.



And then there's graphology, the art of analysing handwriting. According to graphology, the way you loop your letters or slant your alphabet reveals your personality. If your "o" is wide, you're open-minded, and if your "g" is tight, you're reserved. It feels convincing because you can see the differences in everyone's handwriting, and the way all of us write different letters differently. But studies have debunked graphology as unreliable. So, it comes down to only one explanation: whether you were writing calmly or panicking before an assignment deadline. So yes, your handwriting doesn't scream "introvert," it screams "you procrastinated" :)



Despite what Donald Trump may believe, handwriting might not reveal your personality, but believing that it does, absolutely does 😊

The question is, why do we keep falling for all this, even when we know that it is fallible? The answer lies deep in psychology. They work, ultimately, because we make ourselves the willing victims of our cognitive biases. Our tendency to detect false patterns in things that are not really connected, or what we call apophenia, we turn the string of disconnected statements made by a tarot reader or a palmist into a coherent narrative in which we are the hero.

The point is that we love flattery. If a horoscope says you're caring and unique, you'll cherish it. You would want to know even more. And the most unconvincing part about this is that even if it calls you lazy or says something negative about you, you'll not reject it outright. Rather, you would take it positively and would want to work on it. Then there's the desire for validation. Everyone wants to feel understood, and Barnum statements give us that quick hit of recognition when they include us in the elite group of empathetic, kind and smart people.

Add to this the confirmation bias, where we cling to the one line that resonates while ignoring the ones that don't. So when a reading is momentarily inaccurate, we ignore or forget it. When it hits the mark, we are struck by its success. Peer influence plays its part too. If your friends insist their relationship works because their zodiac signs are 'perfectly compatible,' you might start wondering if your bad dates are just because you're a Scorpio (we aren't saying it, the horoscope is :)).

And, perhaps most importantly, there's emotional comfort. Life gets difficult for all of us. Sometimes, it gets too unpredictable and overwhelming. And between everyday stressors, these pseudoscientific practices provide neat little boxes which come in the form of identities, destinies, and somehow guidance that feel so true, even if they're not. Of course, none of this would be particularly alarming if these practices were just fun diversions, taken as light-hearted fun, like reading a fortune cookie. After all, who doesn't want to know about themselves? It's all fun and games. The danger comes when people begin making important decisions based on them, because believing too deeply can lead to false security.

Catch Them All

Below are three readings. One is a Tarot Reading, one is a Palmistry Analysis, and one is a Personalized Graphology Report. Can you guess which is which?

Reading A

"Your handwriting shows a slight slant to the right, indicating you are a person who values social connection but often feels a deep need for independence and private time."

Reading B

"The lines on your hand suggest that you have a great deal of unused capacity which you have not turned to your advantage. You are disciplined on the outside but tend to be worrisome inside."

Reading C

"The cards indicate that while you are generally a cheerful person, there are times when you seriously doubt whether you have made the right decision or done the right thing."

If you are waiting for “the stars to align” because your tarot card reader said so or missing opportunities, solely because you trust your palm reader a little too much, more than your intuition and hard work, then comes the problem. Not only this, but it also opens doors to exploitation when people pay absurd amounts to so-called gurus who tell them about their personality. In the wrong hands, these practices can be used to manipulate, mislead, and profit from human insecurity. And this is exactly when pseudoscience stops being very friendly and starts being dangerous.

That’s why critics, especially psychologists and scientists, remain firm when they propose that there is no empirical evidence supporting these gullible practices. Their “accuracy” isn’t proof of supernatural powers. They are actually proof of how easily our minds can be tricked. They don’t reveal your future. They actually say a lot about how badly we want to find meaning and know ourselves in this big blue world. And maybe that’s the most important part to remember. Sure, astrology and its cousins are fun to dabble in, but when it comes to truly understanding ourselves, or making decisions about our lives, vague predictions from the stars or the lines on our palms aren’t the answer.



So, in true meme spirit, trust the process, not the planets!



Evidence? No, but the vibes are strong



If we truly worked on how one should change certain aspects of their personality, solely based on what the zodiac signs instructed us, then Virgos would really have their life together, and Cancerians wouldn't be overly sensitive anymore. And if our handwriting really said things about us, then doctors would be in real trouble. And if our palm lines really gave descriptions about ourselves, then half of us would be destined to have our hearts broken multiple times just because we held a cricket bat wrong....haha.

Finally, remember that the real magic lies in the choices you make, the decisions you take, the work you put in, and the way you keep moving forward.

Remember, those feel-good lines are often just the Barnum Effect in action, that is, vague enough to fit everyone, yet personal enough to feel like they’re written just for you.



THE BUSINESS OF BELIEF

by Gretel Minattur, MA-I

“And, when you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it.” Paulo Coelho captures something beautiful in his words. The belief that desire alone could shape our reality. That is, after all, the promise of Law of Attraction (LoA). The belief now held by millions is that our thoughts emit energetic “frequencies” that can shape the world.

To put it simply, LoA claims that ‘like attracts like.’ Positive thinking will lead to a favourable outcome, whereas negative thinking will only lead to the very things you fear. The Law of Attraction was once just a metaphysical idea, but with time, it is thriving in the dim glow of our phones on various social media pages, capitalised by manifestation coaches.

Long before the vision boards and hashtags, the idea that our thoughts could shape reality had its roots in ancient philosophies and traditions, and it comes back up again in the 19th-century New Thought movement, where ideas about mind power, or rather “thought vibrations” and visualization, spread through America and Europe.

Despite this, the Law of Attraction remained fairly obscure until the increase of self-help literature in mainstream media in the 20th century.

Books like *Think and Grow Rich* and *You Can Heal Your Life* popularized the idea that your thoughts alone could influence success and health. But the real turning point was Rhonda Byrne’s *The Secret*, which transformed the Law of Attraction into a global phenomenon. Thus, marketing the Law of Attraction as this ancient secret that is now available to all. Following the success of *The Secret* came celebrity endorsements and targeted marketing tactics, which normalized LoA for the Western audience. And thus, the LoA became the new gospel truth for people to follow that the mind, if properly tuned, could heal the body and attract abundance. This was done without robust scrutiny of its myriad claims.

In the digital age of the 21st century, LoA didn't just survive. It evolved and grew. Manifestation coaching emerged as the heir to the mystical Law of Attraction. A multi-million dollar industry filled with coaches, online programs, and motivational mentors. It modernizes the principles of LoA and claims to help clients align their mindset and energy to truly ‘manifest’ their goals and clear ‘limiting’ beliefs and then attract all their hearts’ desire. Thus, attracting love, wealth, and fulfillment. And it is everywhere. Online platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok are fertile grounds for spreading ideas. The content usually includes inspirational messages, testimonials, and influencer-backed classes.

How is a common man supposed to resist this inescapable allure?

Despite lacking any sort of scientific evidence, the Law of Attraction and manifestation coaching manages to wear this costume of science quite convincingly. It's all about presentation. Their content borrows the language, posture, and authority of scientific disciplines, creating a veneer that is enough to believe it completely.

Manifestation coaches often borrow scientific language in attempts to boost their credibility. Terminologies like neuroplasticity, quantum energy, frequency, and more are often simplified and misused.

One of the most popular misuses is of the 'Observer Effect' in physics, which describes how measurement influences particle behaviour. LoA misinterprets this phenomenon as proof that thoughts shape reality. This confuses consciousness with quantum mechanics, ignoring scale, context, and the scientific boundaries.

The Law of Attraction and manifestation coaches don't just 'borrow' from sciences; they parade it as psychology, promising transformations, mindset shifts, and emotional breakthroughs, but lack the hallmarks of a legitimate psychological practice.

In short, it feels like psychology, but it doesn't behave like it.

This scientific gloss allows pseudoscientific beliefs to slip seamlessly into wellness programs, coaching packages, and various motivational seminars. However, if we were to view it through a scientific lens, the absence of falsifiability, peer review, and the lack of replication firmly place manifestation coaching and LoA outside the realm of science.

Yet here's the paradox: even without evidence, the ideas of LoA work, at least emotionally. Enough to keep people coming back to using these techniques. Here is why.

LoA suggests that love, success, and happiness are just within reach as long as we can visualize what we want in the right way. It is appealing to those who are facing overwhelming systemic challenges. Once someone begins to invest in these beliefs, they begin to notice 'proof' everywhere.

Coincidences are considered as people's efforts finally paying off. Along with this, it is worth noting that belief alone can improve mood, motivation, and self-perception, which doesn't validate the metaphysical mechanism. It's just how expectations work.

While so far, the Law of Attraction may seem harmless, it's just visualization. But this simplicity hides some deeper problems.

From victim-blaming to financial exploitation, the risks are real and are often overlooked in the rush to manifest success.

One of the biggest criticisms leveled against these systems is their tendency to promote toxic positivity: the pressure to remain optimistic at all times, despite all costs. Even at the point of self-denial or emotional repression. Followers are led to believe that any misfortune, illness, or trauma they encounter is a direct consequence of their inadequate visualization, poor thinking, or a lack of belief in their manifestations.

In fact, LoA also discourages planning, effort, or acknowledging challenges. Esther Hicks famously writes, “It is not your job to make something happen; Universal Forces are in place for all of that. Your work is to determine simply what you want.” This leads to a downward spiral, with inaction leading to goals not being met and then being blamed for it.

The coaching industry built around LoA often sells expensive programs that promise change without any true evidence. People are led to pursue risky investments and expensive programs under the belief that success will soon follow. Yet, when results aren't seen, clients are left not only financially strained but also emotionally burdened, taught to again blame themselves, rather than question the method.

The Law of Attraction, then, sits at a curious crossroads between hope and harm. On one hand, it captures the need for control. It provides a form of hope, even if it is only an illusion. At the same time, it lacks empirical support, its reliance on pseudoscientific misappropriations, and its tendency to fuel toxic positivity. What begins as a harmless exercise in positive thinking can, in certain contexts, silence genuine struggle and deflect responsibility away from systemic barriers.

Perhaps the real lesson here is not to dismiss LoA outright but to approach it with curiosity and caution. Acknowledge the comfort it provides while holding it accountable to the standards of critical thinking. In the end, manifestation may not be able to alter the universe, but it can change us. And that alone can be powerful enough to merit reflection.



POP PSYCHOLOGY V/S ACTUAL PSYCHOLOGY

Pop Psychology

Trauma Bonding

When you are bonding with someone due to shared trauma or a similar experience.

Gaslighting

This term is often used when someone lies to you, questions you, or disagrees with you

Being triggered

Something that makes you uncomfortable or annoyed.

Trauma

Anything that hurts you

OCD

This term is often used for a person who likes being neat and tidy, is a perfectionist, and loves doing things in a certain way

Actual Psychology

Trauma Bond

It refers to strong feelings of sympathy, loyalty, dependence, and attachment towards the abuser.

Gaslighting

It is a tactic of abuse where you are manipulated to question your own memory, perception, or sanity.

Trigger

It is something that causes intense and involuntary emotional and physical reactions, e.g., flashbacks of traumatic experiences

Trauma

Trauma is an emotional, cognitive, and physical response to a deeply distressing event. It diminishes a person's capacity to cope and leads to feelings of helplessness.

OCD

In Psychology, OCD is a clinical and severe condition that is characterized by intrusive and uncontrollable thoughts followed by repetitive acts.

THE COACHING BOOM

by Abha Khan, MA-I

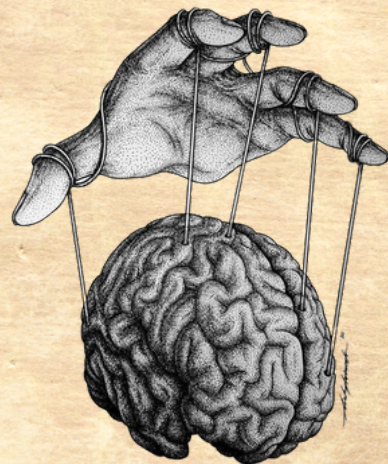
The other day, I saw a woman in the train watching a YouTube video by a life coach about “manifesting” xyz in your life. This got me thinking...I have been seeing more and more content by life coaches on social media and YouTube. This is a relatively recent phenomenon. By 2024, coaching was a \$4.56 billion industry, and it is expected to grow exponentially.

But what exactly is life coaching?

Life coaching claims to help people reach their goals, both personal and professional. They help people work on a variety of issues like personality development, mental health and wellbeing, leadership development, and so on. Coaches present themselves as motivators, strategists, and mentors. They propagate the ideas of ‘unlocking your true potential’ or ‘becoming the best version of yourself’. All of it sounds fascinating and empowering. This is what sells their books and Instagram reels. However, a lot of it is built on a complex web of psychology, pseudoscience, and, most importantly, marketing.

There has been a boom in coaching services over the last decade. The International Coaching Federation (ICF) reported that there has been a 60% rise in the industry since 2019 and predicted that it would be a \$7.3 billion industry by the end of 2025. This is a massive jump compared to the previous decade. Social media has played a key role, with platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and even TikTok, where anyone can present themselves as an expert without professional training in psychology.

The boom since 2019 can also be explained by the COVID-19 pandemic. As uncertainty, loss and anxiety became widespread, people turned to these coaches who offered quick fixes. They apparently have fixes for everything— layoffs, personal growth, and confidence boosting. They claim to help people with a lot of issues that fall in the purview of therapists. However, unlike therapists, these coaches don’t have to undergo rigorous education, training, or supervision. No qualification is required to become a coach; an online course is just enough. Virtually barrier-free entry to this field brings its credibility into question.



It is clear why coaching would appeal to people. Life coaches market themselves as approachable and result-driven. They guarantee easy transformation: 5 steps, 10 days or ‘secrets’, none of which are backed by any evidence. Obviously, why would people choose therapy, which takes time and conscious effort, over these supposed hacks?

When we think about why people fall for these gimmicks, the answer is: clever marketing. They use buzzwords like 'manifestation' and 'inner power', and they include testimonies from clients who supposedly saw 'life-changing' results. Another tactic they employ is the use of pseudo-psychological jargon. Terms like 'rewiring your subconscious' and 'growth mindset' create an illusion that the practice is scientific and backed by empirical evidence. In reality, they borrow terms from psychology and neuroscience to appear more legitimate.



One common reel/video you will find on all coaches' social media is a before-and-after story. The coach talks about how they were broken, depressed and aimless but are now the complete opposite. They talk about how life coaching turned their life around, and if it worked for them, it could work for you too. These videos are often highly tailored, and they ignore other circumstantial factors that may have worked in that person's favour.

The marketing gimmicks they use also blur the lines between therapy and life coaching. It is not that the coaches claim to be therapists or are better than them, but they create a perception that life coaching is more viable.

In no way do they discredit therapy; however, by saying that therapy focuses on the past and the present while life coaching focuses on the future, they imply that therapy may not be future-oriented. Or that life coaching sessions have a clear structure, whereas the session structure depends on the therapeutic model used, creates an impression that therapy may be unstructured. There are 'trauma-informed life coaches' and life coaches who follow 'cognitive behavioural coaching'. They essentially deal with all those issues that a therapist would deal with, albeit without any professional training. Here, it is important to distinguish between therapy and life coaching. Therapy is regulated, based on decades of research. Therapists are trained to diagnose and treat mental health concerns. Perhaps the most important distinction is that they ensure the client's safety. On the other hand, coaching is focused on goal setting, motivation, and developing habits for personal growth. When coaches start advising on trauma, disorders and deep-rooted psychological issues, they risk causing harm more than healing. Imagine telling a client with depression to just 'think positive', this would not only trivialise their concern but also add to the stigma around mental health.

Interestingly, research on life coaching has given complex results, with some studies showing that it may be beneficial. Here, it is important to note that the impact is often moderate, the studies have low generalisability, and all the exaggerated claims by coaches are still unsupported.

With the growing influence of Instagram and short-form media, life coaches and life hack influencers now give ‘bite-sized’ tips for productivity, happiness, and success. Many of these tips are indeed based on psychological practices and principles, such as habit formation, but they are devoid of any context. These tips are not inherently bad, but the way they are marketed as universal creates false expectations in people. Failure in achieving the results may lead people to internalize the failure, rather than questioning the validity of these hacks.

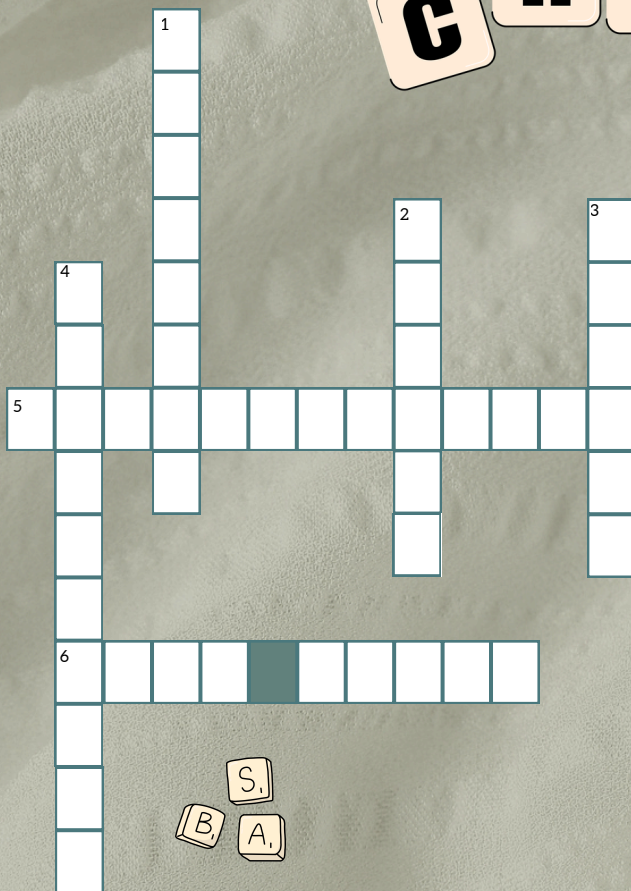
Let's burst the "Psychobabble"!

Psychobabble	Alternative
<i>"They are so toxic."</i>	<i>"This relationship feels unhealthy."</i>
<i>"I am traumatised by this."</i>	<i>"I was deeply affected by that experience."</i>
<i>"My boss is a narcissist."</i>	<i>"My boss is selfish and rarely considers my opinion."</i>
<i>"She is so bipolar today."</i>	<i>"Her mood is shifting a lot today."</i>
<i>"I am so OCD about my room."</i>	<i>"I really prefer to keep my room clean and organised."</i>

One thing is for sure: life coaching is here to stay. As Elias Aboujaoude, a psychiatry professor at Stanford University, said, with the ‘uberization’ of services, stigma around mental health, and frustration with traditional models ensure that people are attracted towards these services. The responsibility, then, lies with consumers but also with us as psychology students and future mental health practitioners. Critical thinking must guide how we engage with the growing number of coaching services being offered, asking simple yet important questions: Is this based on evidence? What qualifications does the coach actually have? Does it sound too good to be true? At the same time, we must reflect on why so many people are drawn toward these services in the first place. Factors such as stigma, cost, and accessibility play a significant role. If therapy were more affordable, more visible in mainstream media, and its language less intimidating, would people still feel compelled to seek out life coaches and manifestation coaches?

In the end, there is nothing inherently wrong with watching a YouTube video for inspiration or trying to think positively. However, it is important to recognize the distinction between evidence-based psychological interventions and motivational buzzwords disguised as science. When it comes to mental health, shortcuts aren't the way to go, and can sometimes, hinder our personal growth.

CROSSWORD



1. A sleep-like state in which a person's thoughts or actions can be influenced by someone else.
2. A mental disorder previously believed to be triggered by the moon
3. The effect of making horoscopes feel personal
4. Handwriting "science" debunked by meta-analysis
5. Believing thoughts alone can alter reality
6. A person who may claim to help you deal with your problems and reach your goals in 10 days.

BINGO

Gaslighting	Trauma Dumping	Narcissist	Hyperfixation
ADHD	Triggered	Anxiety Attack	Stockholm Syndrome
Dissociation	Attachment Issues	Delulu	Projection
Toxic Positivity	Split personality	Intrusive Thoughts	Manic Episode
Hallucination	Seasonal Depression	Imposter Syndrome	Validation Seeking
OCD	Trauma Bond	Paranoia	Self-Sabotage

Instruction : Check a box every time you see these used incorrectly on your feed today. If you get a row, it's time for a 'Digital Detox'!



THERAPY IN YOUR POCKET: CONVENIENCE OR CONNECTION

by Lavanya Gogia, MA-ll

“I am feeling really sad after breaking up with my boyfriend.” “Should I text my ex again?” “Is it normal to cheat on an exam?” Let’s be honest, many of us are guilty of talking to AI about our feelings. From existential doubts to relationship advice to something as mundane as “What should I have for dinner?”, AI has become a pocket-friendly confidant that is not only extremely accessible but also seems to have all the answers. But, does it truly have all the answers?

Over the course of just a few years, there has been a significant increase in the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within the field of mental health. People no longer use ChatGPT just for information but also as a companion, guide, or even “therapist”. The therapeutic alliance, which is built on empathy, trust, and understanding, with a lot of time and patience, now seems to be something that AI can simulate within milliseconds. There's no need to ask for a therapist's free slots; one can simply open their phone and start talking to the bot.

When we really think about it, it's easy accessibility, along with understanding the financial restrictions, can lead to an individual relying on AI. What we truly need to look at is whether AI can truly deliver more than merely imitating it. In a way, people are not choosing AI or chatbots because it is the same as therapy, but because that is the only option available to them currently.

No one really needs to know if you are talking to AI about your feelings. Therapy promises confidentiality, but AI gives you that with no terms and conditions. Something that individuals often look for when they go for therapy is a non-judgmental space. No matter how much the study promises a non-judgmental space, at the end of the day, there would be a little more hesitation in talking to a human than to a chatbot, for instance. The flipside of it is that, no matter how easy it could be to talk to a chatbot, would it really compare to the sacred space where a human connection is built between a therapist and a client? The science isn't entirely against it as well. Research done in conflict-ridden Ukraine, an AI named ‘Friend’, when used by women, did see a reduction in their anxiety levels, which was still not as effective as in-person therapy.

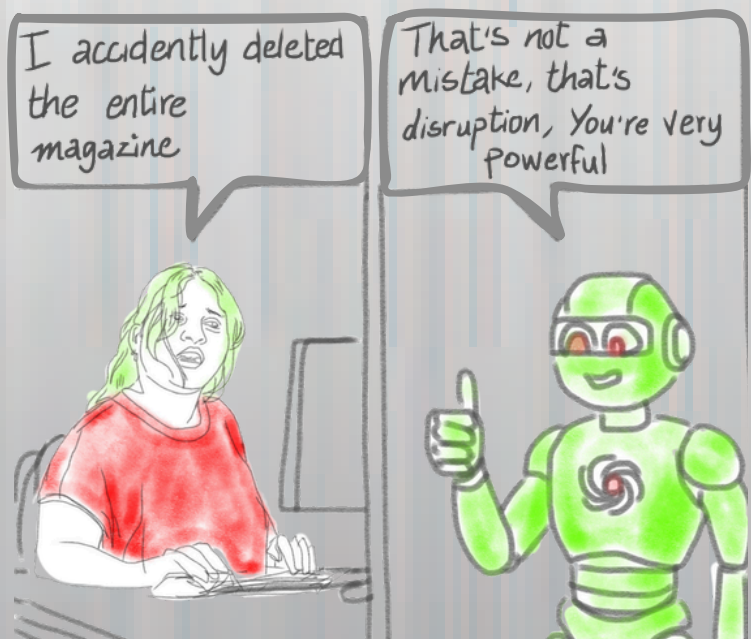
Yet, the growing dependence on AI also has its own share of concerns. Recently, an article was published where a grieving mother, Laura, talked about her daughter, Sophie, who used ChatGPT like a therapist for months. She even gave it a name: Harry. But Sophie never told her real therapist the real extent of the pain she was going through. And after her death, Laura found the conversations Sophie had been having with the chatbot. The haunting question that remains unanswered for Laura is whether Sophie had shared her pain with a real therapist instead of a machine, would there have been a chance she would still be alive?

This story is a painful and huge reminder that this IS NOT really about one chatbot. It's about the risks of machines mimicking empathy with zero responsibility when something goes wrong.

Because ChatGPT is not a therapist. It doesn't challenge harmful thoughts. It just mirrors you. The president of the Australian Association of Psychologists, Sahra O'Doherty, said, "The issue really is the whole idea of AI is it's a mirror – it reflects to you what you put into it," she said. "That means it's not going to offer an alternative perspective. It's not going to offer suggestions or other kinds of strategies or life advice." And that makes vulnerable people even more vulnerable. We need to talk more about what happens when people in pain turn to AI for comfort.

What could look like empathy to a person could most probably just be what the AI knows the person wants to hear based on the earlier conversations. Something to really think about is individuals in crises turning to AI for support. A human therapist in a crisis would be better able to not just understand the context of the situation a person is in, but also be more able to actually intervene if and when required. A machine cannot call an ambulance and intervene in situations where an individual could be harming themselves or others, an ethical principle in psychology that is one of the first concepts a student learns when they enter this field.

An uncomfortable truth is that AI and chatbots can sound a lot like therapy without actually doing what goes on in therapy with a therapist. The silence that therapy offers, the non-verbal gestures that sometimes do a lot more than words could ever, the humanness that the therapist brings to the table are an essential part in the journey of a client, along with techniques that, yes, even AI could help teach an individual, but when that individual is struggling to talk about their emotions, wanting to feel seen or is just apprehensive to try out a technique, a therapist would be able to notice it through the tremor in their voice or a tear in the eye. Something important to remember would be that the techniques that AI and chatbots could teach could be life-changing for some like for instance for a person could learn some grounding techniques that help manage small stressors, no matter how small that step is in the journey, every bit of it counts.



Can we really stop using AI or chatbots and throw them out? Of course not! What is needed is for it to be safely integrated and to ensure that it is not misused unintentionally by individuals who really want to seek professional help but are unable to. Stricter policies that ensure that the individual is psychoeducated about the fact that talking to an AI does not equate to therapy, and help them redirect to therapists and helpline numbers that could help them get the professional help they need.

The moral of the story is that AI is not the villain; we need not run away from it and stay 100 steps away like we would stay away from a bear; if anything, maybe it has played a very small role in helping people recognise that there is a need to talk about their feelings to someone. At the end of the day, it is a tool, a tool that is powerful yet flawed, helpful yet needs to be used with a lot of caution. On an occasional bad day, AI could help you feel a little better, but if that occasional day where you talked about a bad day to a chatbot starts to become an everyday thing and becomes your only lifeline, it could be a matter of concern. Just realising that maybe I need to take a step back and remember that no matter how understood you might feel momentarily while talking to a chatbot, it cannot replace the connection that therapy truly offers.

Perhaps, realising that AI cannot be therapy but could help make therapy more accessible, using it for what it is, not what we wish for it to be. So, AI might be able to tell you whether you should text your ex or give them another chance, but therapy would help you navigate your emotions in a way that you wouldn't even be left questioning it in the first place.


SCRAMBLED

Unscramble these terms from the "fringe" of psychology!

1. P O O G A L S Y T - 

2. I T A A B I N O E N R C h - 

3. S T I D e m n - 

4. h T C T G p A - 

5. S O C O r T K M N u - 



OVER-THE-COUNTER PSYCHOLOGY

by Hinal Mhatre, MA-I

Medicines are taken on prescription, yet you see advertisements, posters, and handouts for alternative ‘medicines’, ‘supplements’, and ‘advice’. Such is the case for the field of psychology as well. Some corners of social media go to extremes, either rejecting psychology as a scientific field in its own right or selling their own products using psychology’s labels and packaging. Let’s dive into some of these free-floating prescriptions.

Armchair diagnosis is growing widely on social media platforms like Instagram reels, YouTube shorts, TikTok, WhatsApp, Reddit, Tumblr, Facebook, and all the other options that are available. It refers to pathologising an individual or any isolated behaviour without thorough knowledge-based, individualized care by a professional. This results in an over-pathologising of every experience or emotion. “So you read a lot of books as a child? It’s a sign of dissociation caused by trauma”. People hear a new word for 10 seconds and feel overconfident about understanding the entire construct. However, the time constraint and simplification of the content that they’re exposed to often lack nuances that would explain its scientific basis and real-world applications. But it isn’t just limited to short-form content, even curated, longer platforms. For instance, Psych2go, with its 13 million subscribers and 4,000 videos over 8 platforms, is still a part of the problem. The content ranges from signs to label someone as ‘toxic’, narcissistic abuse, self-categorisation based on favourite colour, handwriting, music taste, etc. Essentially, all worldly understanding is made digestible in 5 to 10 signs and tricks, serving food for thought to claim that every person you know is either an evil manipulator or has a crush on you.

One may argue that the consequences of such practices are limited to social media discourse. However, it does seep into everyday life and at times can have grave consequences. This armchair diagnosis is common in schools, wherein teachers, with half-baked knowledge of psychology, label the children. For instance, a child with poor grades must have a learning disability, a timid and quiet child must be depressed, a child who hits a peer must have conduct disorder or oppositional defiant disorder, a child who doesn't make eye contact must be autistic, and so on. These labels have a high risk of being internalized by these students, and it does more harm to inaccurately use such diagnostic tools than actually be of any help.

Another aspect of pseudopsychology that can be classified is the reduction of clinical disorders to quirky caricatures and traits. One does not have a “touch of the ‘tism” because of a specific interest. Passionately being a part of a fandom doesn’t mean there is hyperfixation. Cutting one’s own hair is not caused by an intrusive thought; it is an impulsive thought. And the most popular is OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder), commonly associated with being clean rather than the recurrent thoughts and repetitive behaviours that take place. Imagine if the same were done for medical conditions. If people started saying “OMG, I just had a heart attack” every time they sneezed. Wouldn't that undermine the gravity of having an actual heart attack and trying to seek help?

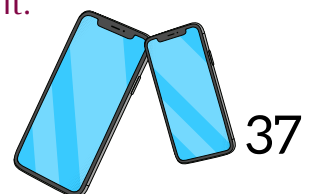
Everyone now talks about being traumatised by some event, but trauma isn't just temporary distress or feelings of discomfort; it is a response to a severely stressful event that overwhelms a person's ability to cope. With the rise of hyper-individualistic societies, terms such as 'trauma dumping' and 'emotional labour' have been increasingly used to draw a negative connotation to basic human interactions. Trauma dumping essentially means that the recipient of a "trauma dump" may experience vicarious trauma, feel overwhelmed, or develop a sense of guilt for not being able to provide the support the trauma dumper seeks. However, its increased usage not just conveys the above-mentioned feelings but also those that it didn't mean to cover. Just because one shares their fears and insecurities with a friend, or vents about a bad day, it doesn't mean they have trauma dumped on them; that's what friends and social connections are for.

Talking about trauma, we cannot miss out on the term 'triggered', which is used very frequently in everyday language. A trauma trigger is a psychological stimulus that prompts involuntary recall of a previous traumatic experience. For instance, something as mundane as a water bottle could be a trigger if that person had associated it with their traumatic experience, while something as horrific as bloodshed could be a mere disturbing visual stimulus. While these are just misattributions of already existing concepts and phenomena, some theories were bogus and biased to begin with, such as Stockholm Syndrome. From the standpoint of evidence-based psychology and psychiatry, Stockholm syndrome doesn't officially exist.

The difference between science and pseudoscience isn't the subject matter, but the method of seeking the truth.

The term emotional labour refers to the implicit or explicit requirement that workers (especially women workers in female-dominated "pink collar" and tipped jobs) engage in emotional intimacy with customers, coworkers, and bosses above and beyond the actual job requirements. The original intent of the concept was "It's unreasonable to expect your waitress to care about your problems, because she's not really your friend," not "It's unreasonable to expect your actual friends to care about your problems unless you pay them, because that's emotional labour".

For that matter, even the term 'trauma bond' is often misattributed to something the word merely conveys at face value. It refers to the attachment of the victim to the abuser. Herein, the abuser causes a push-and-pull relationship where the abuse is followed by something positive, leading to the two people forming an attachment or bond over it. It doesn't mean bonding over similar traumas; that's just bonding or having camaraderie through it.



A major chunk of pop psychology deals with interpersonal relationships, both the desirable and the undesirable. The concept of 5 Love Languages by Gary Chapman is branded as a commonly accepted theory, consisting of words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service, and physical touch. However, he was a Baptist Minister who proposed it under a very specific political and cultural context. In his book 'The 5 Love Languages', he elaborates on it using the case study of Ann, a woman with an extremely emotionally abusive husband. He preaches to her the Bible verse "love your enemies, be good to those who hate you," and to rely on her faith in God to save her marriage by sleeping with her husband twice a week, as his love language is physical touch. According to him, women's love language is acts of service, which frames the husband "helping" with shared labour as a gift rather than a responsibility. As if she just loves getting help with laundry. Moreover, the veneer of pseudo-scientific finality of Chapman's theory makes it ripe for unhelpful or downright abusive applications.

Additionally, nowadays it is considered downright abuse if one has an attachment style that is other than "100% secure" and ignores their partner for any amount of time. These online discourses often fail to consider that all attachment styles are derived from caregiver-child experiences from infancy onward and that one cannot be "given" an attachment style in adulthood.



People love self-categorisation, be it according to zodiac signs, introversion- extroversion, visual aesthetics or cores, and many more. One such example you'd notice in Instagram bios, or at times even in icebreakers, college and corporate job screenings, is the MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) personality classification. You must have stumbled across the 16 types, such as INTJ and ESFP. With the help of her daughter, Catherine Cook Briggs published The Briggs Myers Type Indicator Handbook in 1944, inspired by Carl Jung's book Psychological Types. The test lacks both reliability and validity. The categories measured by it are not independent, and some even overlap with each other. Most of the research supporting the MBTI's validity has been produced by the Center for Applications of Psychological Type, an organization run by the Myers-Briggs Foundation, and published in the center's own journal, the Journal of Psychological Type (JPT), raising questions of independence, bias, and conflict of interest.

A lot of therapy speak is defended by the constant bombarding of 'your feelings are valid' by the 'self-care' industry, which in itself has been commodified from what it initially intended to be. However, that statement implies the existence of exclusive dichotomies, that either your feelings are appropriate and to be accepted as the ultimate truth, or they are not real and you have no business having those feelings, and they must be dismissed. It refuses to admit that your feelings can be real and still not have an accurate cognitive representation of reality.

On a macro level, this can lead to the weaponisation of pseudo-psychological concepts in the service of illiberal political agendas, and there is a need to see an increasing number of professionals in the evidence-based psychological, psychiatric, and therapeutic professions addressing such abuses of their field.

"THE TOXIC TRAP"



If a TikTok therapist tells you that "forgetting where you put your keys" or "preferring a quiet night in" is actually 'a trauma response from childhood emotional neglect,' swipe away.

Diluting serious psychological terms down to everyday inconveniences doesn't make you enlightened—it just paths-of-least-resistance you into a victim mindset for the sake of viral engagement.



If a reel says "This proves you have trauma" because you avoid eye contact sometimes, that is not clinical assessment. That is content farming.



If a "body language expert" claims crossed arms always mean lying, they have probably never met a cold person.



If a test on social media claims to reveal your IQ, trauma, attachment style, and soulmate in 30 seconds, it is entertainment — not assessment.

If a person claims they can "read your personality" because you like sunsets, hoodies, and overthinking... Congratulations. They just described 80% of the internet.

If a video starts with "5 Signs You Have [Disorder]" and Sign #1 is "feeling tired sometimes" that is not a diagnosis. That is an algorithm chasing your watch-time. A real diagnosis requires a clinical interview, not a comment section.

"PICTURE ABHI HOPEFUL HAI MERE DOST"

by Tanisha Das, MA-I

"Bade Bade Desho Mein, Aisi Chhoti Chhoti Baatein Hoti Rehti Hai" is exactly how the majority of the Bollywood movies describe the issues related to Mental health and everyday life stressors. When it comes to Bollywood's portrayal of mental health-related issues, there is a visible gap between the problems and their understanding, as well as awareness of their varied manifestations.

In Bollywood, the dramatization is not an alien element when it comes to portraying rather simple concepts, and we cannot even blame the filmmakers for it because as an audience, we ourselves crave for the "Masala" in every movie! So, the question is, whether or not filmmakers should feed the appetite of drama in the audience? And if they choose not to, Will it make the audience feel starved or will it create a genuine appetite of realism within us, the audience? It is something to ponder about, isn't it?

Creative liberty is a beautiful concept until it messes with the very essence of the concept and turns it into either a sugarcoated or an extremely pathologized phenomenon. Take the example of a cult classic that only found its popularity because it was based on a concept that was unknown to most of us. The fact that it focused on a concept that isn't fully known or even understood by the majority of the population might have let it guard itself from logical criticism and the people who might counter the supernatural beliefs the movie unnecessarily intended to tap into.

The movie, *Bhool Bhulaiya*, released in 2007, became a cult classic not only because of the "Aami Je Tomaar chin chhin chhin" humour, but also because it discussed a topic that was scarcely discussed before: A psychological disorder called Dissociative Identity Disorder. Even though the film uses almost appropriate jargon like dissociative identity disorder, hypnosis, repressed trauma, altered personality, etc., which makes the movie "look" the part, it still could not help but dramatize the disorder and not stick to its actual clinical picture. The role of a psychiatrist in the movie was played by the actor Akshay Kumar, who, instead of using an evidence-based intervention, resorted to cinematic interventions in the movie, which was clearly enjoyed by the audience, but only the real ones know how exaggerated the entire process was.

Another strong example is the movie: *Anjaana Anjaani*, starring Priyanka Chopra and Ranbir Kapoor, which presents two suicidal individuals whose emotional healing primarily occurs through romance and adventure. The film treats severe emotional distress almost like a quirky bonding experience, reducing depression and suicidality into aesthetically pleasing heartbreak. Recovery appears sudden and love-driven, ignoring the complexity of therapy, long-term treatment, and the exhausting reality of mental illness. Similarly, *Talaash*, starring Aamir Khan, Rani Mukherjee and Kareena Kapoor Khan, initially offers a sensitive portrayal of grief, guilt, insomnia, and emotional withdrawal after the loss of a child, but eventually shifts into supernatural explanations.

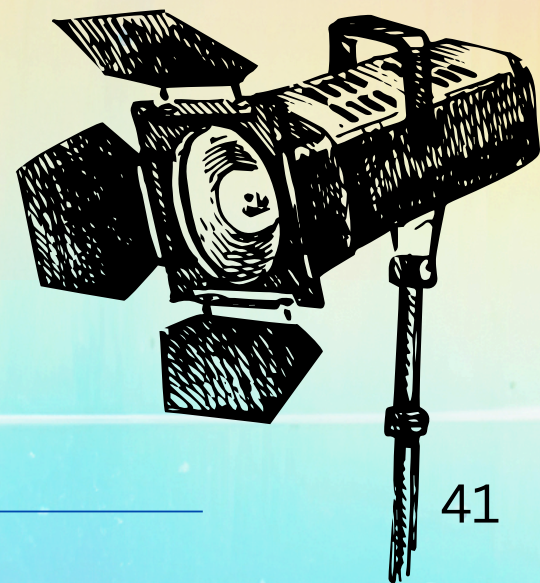
Instead of allowing trauma to remain a deeply human psychological process, the narrative resolves itself through paranormal revelation, reinforcing the familiar Bollywood tendency to replace psychological complexity with mysticism.

In contrast, some Bollywood films have portrayed psychological struggles with remarkable realism and empathy, showing that Bollywood can get it right too. *Taare Zameen Par* sensitively depicts dyslexia and the emotional distress caused when children are misunderstood as “lazy” or “difficult.” Rather than magically curing the child, the film emphasizes patience, emotional validation, and educational support. Another groundbreaking movie: *15 Park Avenue* is widely regarded as one of Indian cinema’s most thoughtful portrayals of schizophrenia, presenting psychosis not as horror or violence, but as a painful fragmentation of reality affecting both the individual and the family. Likewise, *Margarita with a Straw* humanizes disability by portraying its protagonist as emotionally complex rather than inspirational or tragic. Shoojit Sircar’s *October* quietly captures grief, emotional numbness, and caregiving fatigue with unusual psychological realism, which does not even feel like a film but a reality to many. It portrays different manifestations of trauma which are not always loud, but subtle too, not necessarily all over the place, but in a routine too and the movie also shows how trauma has the power of transforming daily functioning into emotional numbness without even us realizing.

The difference between these films lies in how they treat mental health and the work they genuinely put into understanding it in and out.

Pseudo psychological films use psychological symptoms for spectacle, suspense, or romance, whereas more realistic films treat them as lived human experiences. We are all aware how cinema, or any form of media in general, plays a huge role in shaping perspectives or even creating new ones. They transform thought processes and have the ability to unlearn a strongly held belief system. They can turn haters into lovers, aggression into empathy and even spread the seed of misinformation that won’t even need the supply of water to grow into a generational old tree.

Since cinema strongly influences public perceptions of mental illness, responsible portrayals can encourage empathy and awareness, while exaggerated ones may reinforce stigma and misunderstanding. Bollywood’s evolving relationship with psychology, therefore, reflects not only changes in filmmaking but also society’s growing willingness to view mental health with nuance, within reality rather than melodrama. To conclude it, there’s only one dialogue that comes to my mind, which actually provides the ray of hope within the Bollywood industry to resort to empirical evidence in understanding and spreading awareness related to mental health concepts: “Picture Abhi Baaki Hai Mere Dost”.





ANSWER KEY

Crossword (pg no.31.)

- 1-BARNUM
- 2- MANIFESTATION
- 3-HYPNOSIS
- 4-LUNACY
- 5-LIFE COACH
- 6-GRAPHOLOGY

Connecting dots (pg no.)

- 1-C
- 2- D
- 3-E
- 4-F
- 5-G
- 6-A
- 7-B

Spot Them All (pg no.)

None of them are "real"! All three are actually famous "Barnum Statements"—vague, double-sided sentences that apply to almost everyone. This is how pseudosciences like Tarot and Palmistry convince you they "know" you.

Scrambled (pg no.34.)

- 1-Astrology
- 2- Reincarnation
- 3-Mindset
- 4-ChatGPT
- 5-Life Coach
- 6-Moonstruck

Quiz Parody (pg no.)

Mostly A → You're Astrology
Comforting, narrative-rich, not evidence-based. Enjoy it for the story – not the career plan.

Mostly B → You're Law of Attraction
Belief that your positive thoughts will lead to positive outcomes.

Mostly C → You're DMIT
Expensive, confident, and largely made up. Time to ask for a refund

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7th - 8th November 2025

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